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October 15, 2003

TO: Each Supervisor

FROM: Thomas L. Garthwaite, M.D. 
Director and Chief Medical Officer

Jonathan E. Fielding, M.D. M.P.H. 
Director of Public Health and Health Officer

SUBJECT: UPDATE ON MRSA

On February 11, 2003, your Board asked the Department of Health Services to provide an update on methicillin resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) in the County Jail. This report has been expanded to include reports of MRSA in different communities in Los Angeles. This is an update to our report of September 22, 2003.

MRSA at the Los Angeles County Jail

The total number of cases of MRSA skin infections identified in 2003 is 1,387, including 196 identified in September. This is a slight decrease from 202 cases identified in August. Eighteen percent of the cases in September were identified within 5 days of admission to the Jail. This is a significant increase from 9 percent in 2002 and 14 percent earlier this year. These infections are presumed to be community-acquired rather than infections acquired in jail and underscore the difficulty in trying to eradicate MRSA from the Jail when the pathogen is being re-introduced from the outside.

The Joint Public Health-Jail MRSA Task Force will meet on October 20. Topics for discussion include the institution of an MRSA ward for inmates at Men's Central Jail and the development of an intervention using soap containing chlorhexadine, a powerful antimicrobial agent, for inmates.

An overview of MRSA in correctional facilities, including ones in Texas, Georgia, and in the Los Angeles County jail, was published in the October 16, 2003 issue of the *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*.

MRSA in the Los Angeles County Probation Facilities

Twenty-nine cases of MRSA infections, including eight in September, have been reported since April 2003, when the first case was identified. Half the cases for which we have information were identified within the first five days after admission to Probation facilities. These infections are presumed to be community-acquired.

MRSA in the Community

As of October 10, 108 children hospitalized with MRSA in Los Angeles county have been reported to Public Health. Of the 101 for whom we have information, half are four years old or younger. Seventy percent are Hispanic, and the average length of hospital stay is six days. Slightly more than half the parents have been interviewed, and Public Health staff will analyze the interview results to determine risk factors for the disease. Pediatric reporting will end in November, although data collection and analysis on the reported cases will continue.

Investigators at Harbor-UCLA Medical Center have recently been awarded a grant from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to study MRSA in selected communities in the county. As part of the grant, pediatric isolates collected from the Public Health's pediatric study will be analyzed for relatedness and virulence.

There have been no new cases of MRSA in a local college football team. Based on analysis of case-control study, sharing bars of soap, towels, and a history of cuts and abrasions were significantly associated with acquiring MRSA. Public Health has issued control guidelines to the school and staff have been invited to speak to health care providers at the school. MRSA in members of athletic teams has been reported in various locations in the U.S.

MRSA in Men Who Have Sex with Men

Public Health staff have refined the data analysis on MRSA in HIV-positive MSM. The study results underscore the importance of the continuing need to educate both health care providers and the public, including MSM, on community acquired-MRSA. Staff will work with owners of commercial sex venues and other settings such as gyms, health clubs and spas, to distribute specific prevention information to patrons and employees.

We will report back to you in 90 days. In the meantime, please contact either of us if you have questions or need more information.

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Chief Administrative Officer
County Counsel
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